

A Short List of Immensely Irritating Neil Gaiman Things

By Peter David Smith

It's surprising that I'm writing this, considering that I used to buy "The Sandman" from those little rotating comic book stands in newsagent shops every month in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

I also remember buying "Signal to Noise" in the 1990s and thinking how great it was, mostly because of Dave McKean's illustrations but also because the idea of the End of the World seen through the fractured lens of the first millennium, the second millennium and a personal impending doom was very clever.

I suppose you could say that Neil Gaiman went down in my estimation. Gradually. Over a period of three decades.

I did like DC's "The Dreaming" series at first. Different writers creating their own versions of the characters in the Dreaming world.

They were beginning to get to somewhere interesting under Alisa Kwitney's direction. But then Gaiman himself spoiled that by stepping in and changing the type of stories they were doing.

He, apparently, wanted all the stories to build up into a greater, more epic, story which would be "going somewhere" and heading towards a big conclusion. I don't understand why he would want that. The anthology style of the book was much better. More dreamlike. We awake from random, non-linear dream sequences and wonder what was going on. Dreams shouldn't be an epic with a big finale. That isn't how they work. So here is a short list of very irritating things:

1. His tendency to write about dreams in a conventional, linear, format which doesn't give the reader the sense of non sequitur and randomness which would characterise actual dreaming. It would be better to make dream experiences follow an avant garde experimental form near to the works of Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Brian Aldiss and William S. Burroughs. Dream worlds shouldn't follow the same linear logic as the waking world.
2. His frequent use of platitudes and mannerisms of the type used by pop psychology about "giving yourself permission" to care about your self empowerment and sense of entitlement or some such lame twaddle. The worst example of that is the Lucifer Netflix series.
3. His continual recycling of stories from folklore, mythology, crime statistics and old books which are in the public domain. He is like a human A.I. programme which has trained itself on these borrowed source materials.
4. His portrayal as "Despair" as fat.

5. His denial of there being any such thing as writer's block or creative block.
6. His tendency to behave in interviews like someone who is always "nice" and polite. This is possibly the most unforgiveable trait.
7. His apparent position that writers should only have direct knowledge and experience of writing and never of the million other ways in which a writer could gain useful experience of the world outside of their little writing room. Such as bloody working in a job which doesn't continually flatter the ego.
8. His portrayal of the lands of Dream and Faerie etc as traditional unreconstructed medieval monarchies with kings, queens, lords and ladies ruling them. That kind of lazy writing does nothing to help the progress of democracy.
9. His almost complete lack of any original narrative content that could be convincingly thought to derive from his personal experience of life in the world.
10. His absurd statements to the world to the effect that "magic is real" and that he is somehow "changing people's lives magically" with his writing.
11. His portrayal of "chivalry" as something other than what it so obviously is: Wealthy privileged people enslaving horses and menacing the common folk with a posh looking *chiv*.
12. His name being printed on the cover of numerous books which he didn't write but for which he nevertheless gets a credit alongside the actual author because he has sneaked in and written a preface.

If I'm wrong about any of this then I'm wrong. But I felt a lot of frustration about these things and I needed to get them off my chest.

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